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Best Restaurants

62
THINGS YOU
MUST TASTE
NOW!



PLUS

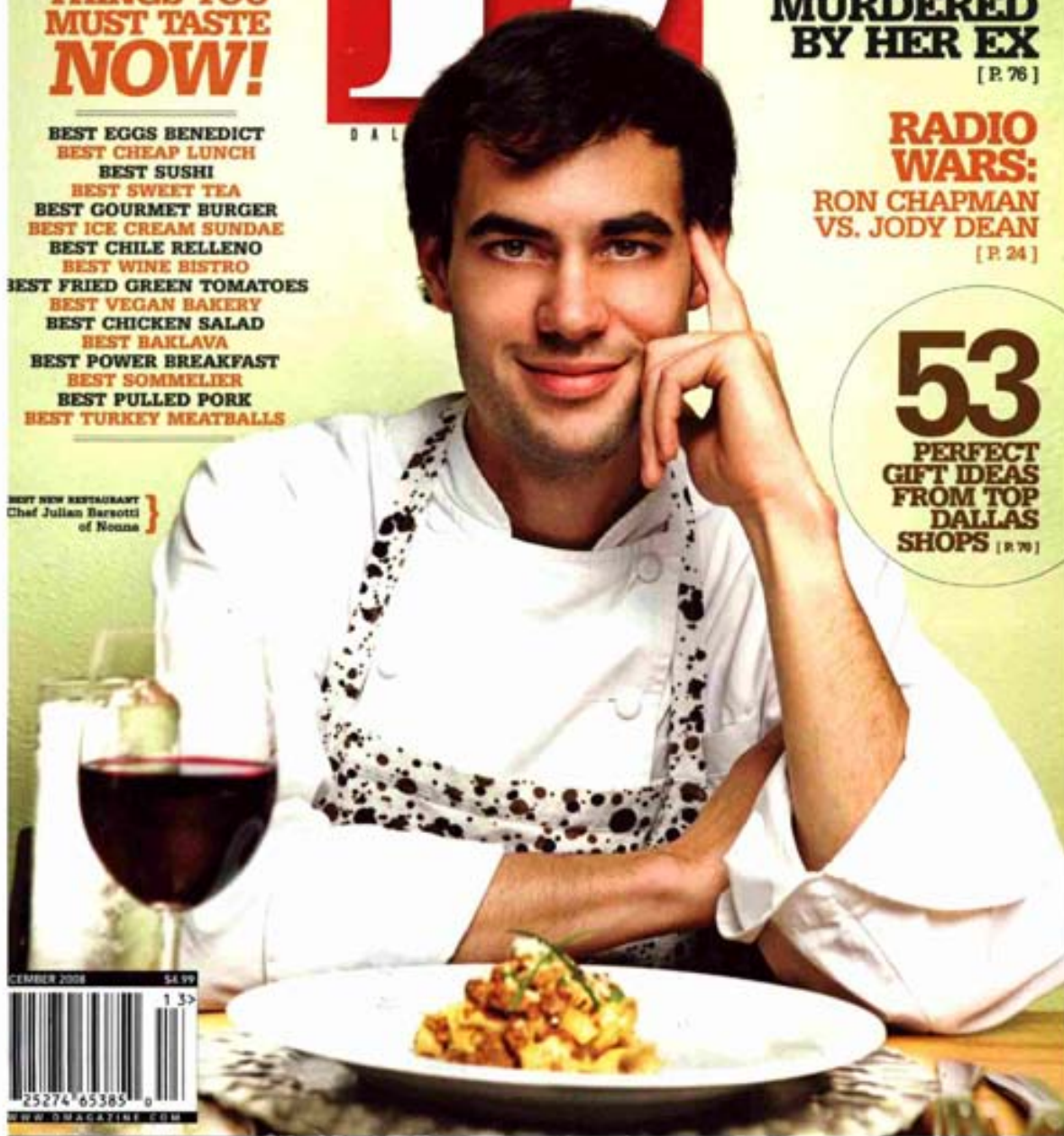
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BY HER EX
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- BEST EGGS BENEDICT
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- BEST BAKLAVA
- BEST POWER BREAKFAST
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- BEST PULLED PORK
- BEST TURKEY MEATBALLS

BEST NEW RESTAURANT
 Chef Julian Barcott
 of Noona

53
PERFECT
GIFT IDEAS
FROM TOP
DALLAS
SHOPS [P. 70]



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BEST RESTAURANTS 2008

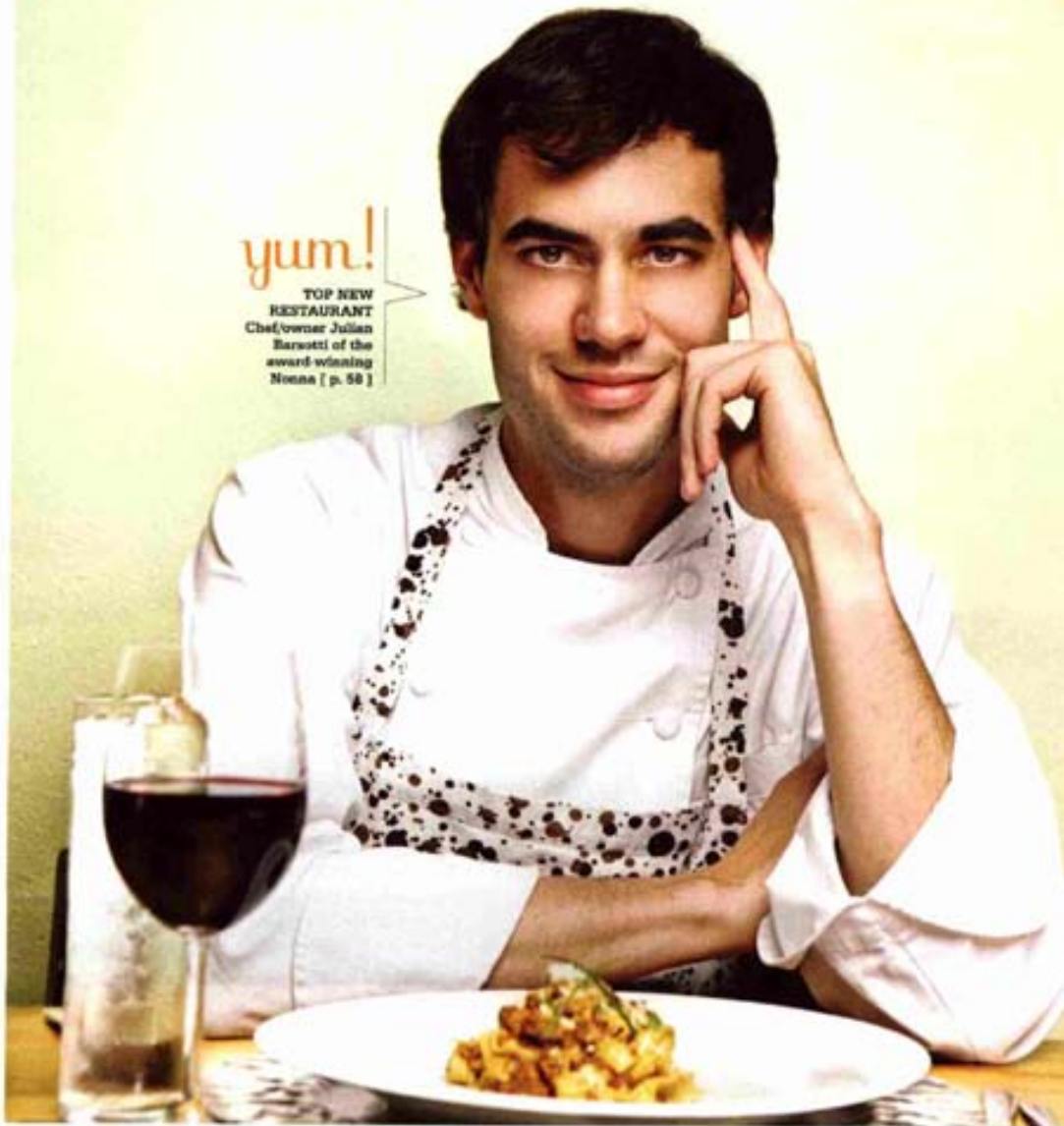
S

ome say it's been a turbulent year in the Dallas dining community, what with high-profile restaurant closings, lagging sales, and a seesaw economy. But we prefer to see the wine glass half full and declare 2008 one of the city's most savory years yet. We've devoured memorable meals from Frisco to Oak Cliff and watched much of our homegrown talent nab national accolades. So put down the 401(k) statement for a bit and dig into ...

Our Top Tastes From a Delicious Year in Dining

yum!

TOP NEW RESTAURANT
 Chef/owner Julian Barzotti of the award-winning Noona [p. 58]



BOBIE HELM

EDITED BY NANCY NICHOLS • Reported by Sarah Evans, Teresa Oubbina, Kristin Hart, and Todd Johnson

BEST RESTAURANTS **2008**

The 10 Best Restaurants in Dallas

WE KNOW. You say, "Only 10? How is that possible?" Trust us: we could have easily named twice as many worthy restaurants to this list. But we cut to the core of eateries, the quintessential Dallas restaurants. Where, we asked ourselves, would we take an out-of-town visitor to eat to make sure she went home satisfied, smiling, and duly impressed with our dining scene? Which 10 restaurants give an outsider a complete picture of what Dallas has to offer? Here, in no particular order, are our 10 favorite places that are uniquely Dallas.



York Street
On Our Top 10 Because:
It's closer than Chez Panisse. And we like chick chefs.

York Street is the kind of place you'd expect to find in San Francisco or New York. Chef Sharon Hage walks the walk. She uses local ingredients and seasonal produce and makes every day a culinary adventure with her elegant, robust food and a worthy wine list to match. The dining room holds maybe 40 seats, but by keeping it small, she wields careful control, delivering one of the biggest dining experiences in the city.



Tillman's Roadhouse
On Our Top 10 Because:
Everyone loves a party with great food.

This Bishop Arts District mainstay has evolved from sleepy neighborhood cafe into the place to sup and be seen south of the Trinity, if not all of Dallas. Every night is a Texas-sized party at owner Sara Tillman's namesake restaurant, with blood orange margaritas flowing freely. Tillman's business partners are party planner Todd Fiscus and interior designer Rob Dailey. Two years ago, they infused Tillman's with a large dash of East Texas panache: brocade wallpaper, carved wood antelope busts, Murano chandeliers, Eames rockers in the lounge, and the movie *Giant* playing overhead. It's all gussied up with gusto, as is chef Dan Landsberg's roadhouse haute cuisine, including chipotle barbecue ribs, chicken-fried hanger steak, and venison Frito pie, an instant modern-day classic. For dessert, indulge and make your own s'mores with maple marshmallows and dark chocolate bark, or simply sit back and have another ginger lemon drop. This is one party you won't want to leave.

SMORES: GUSTAV SCHNEIDER; ALL OTHERS: KEVIN WINTER/MARKET

• See our directory on page 89 for restaurant information.

Stephan Pyles

On Our Top 10 Because: *Stephan Pyles changes international spices as often as we change our hair color.*



with green olives and capers). If you insist on fine dining—and this is a place that begs for it—Pyles offers three distinctive dining spaces, including an intimate wine room and private dining room. If you're new to the Pyles party, try his classic bone-in cowboy rib-eye with red chile onion rings, followed by a slice of heaven and hell cake. Otherwise, try the seasonal dishes—they're created by a true master.

Chef Stephan Pyles is the Marco Polo of the Dallas dining scene. He loves to travel, and every time he returns from an exotic trip to a foreign land, the menu at his eponymous restaurant morphs to reflect his flavor discoveries. His New Millennium Southwestern Cuisine is more than just a fancy name. You can taste Pyles' intense attention to detail in every bite. The dining room is stunning, sexy, and multi-purposed. If you don't have a reservation, take a seat at the communal table for the full menu, or at the tapas-ceviche bar, where you can choose from a lengthy list of flatbreads, pizzas, tapas, and ceviche (we love the salmon Veracruzano



CHEF STEPHAN PYLES



SHRIMP TACO

Fearing's

On Our Top 10 Because: *There are seven different dining areas, one for each of our moods.*

Ladies and gentlemen, step right up to Fearing's, home of Dean Fearing, the quintessential Dallas chef and the greatest dining show in town. Like Big Tex at the State Fair, Fearing's presence in the seven-area dining room is the main attraction. You can't miss him—he's the spiky-haired dude in chef whites struttin' his custom-made-Lucchese-clad feet through the dining room like he owns the joint. Watch yourself, pardner, and don't let that goofy grin fool ya. He can break your knuckles with a handshake and knock your teeth out with a swift backslap. That's just his way of saying howdy to a uniquely Dallas breakfast, lunch, dinner, or Sunday brunch. The ever-changing menu is beefy—there's buffalo, antelope, veal, and rib-eye steaks, plus a few fabulous fish items for wimps. All entrees come with accompaniments like the Gulf lump crab "succotash" covered with spicy Tabasco-bacon syrup and barbecued clams. Fearing's is not your average upscale eatery. It's truly Dallas—bold, brash, and sassy.



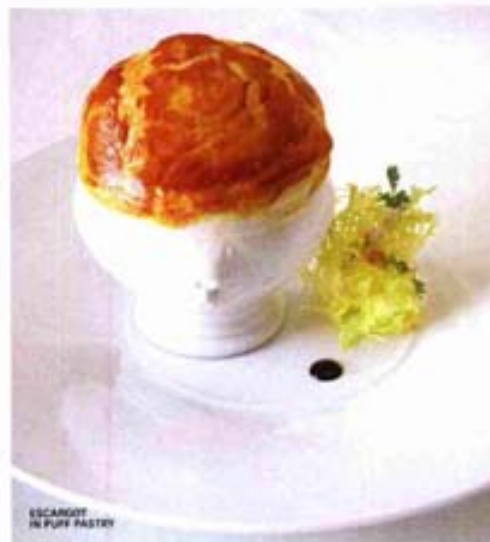
CHEF DEAN FEARING



Rosewood Mansion on Turtle Creek

On Our Top 10 Because: *New chef John Tesar restored and reinvented a culinary icon.*

Executive chef John Tesar has erased any memory of his predecessor at the Mansion. No small feat. He's won the hearts of local diners and the national press by taking the starch out of the Mansion and transforming it into a vibrant dining experience. From the exclusive Chef's Room to the herb garden off the patio to the pilgrimages abroad designed to re-ignite his creativity, Tesar broadcasts the fact that "foodie" is definitely spoken here. Now we ask: Dean who?



Mi Cocina

On Our Top 10 Because: *It's the perfect Tex-Mex primer. The people-watching is a bonus.*

Who serves the best Tex-Mex in town? The question has likely led to more than one barroom brawl. Anyone who has lived here longer than a month has an educated opinion, and everyone has his own tried-and-true hole-in-the-wall joints like Ma's, Herrera's, Avila's, and El Jordan's. It's not that we don't agree. They all offer something special, whether it's a combination plate, the thinnest chips, or the spiciest salsa. But when it comes down to one restaurant that hits every menu component on the sweet spot, we have to pick Mi Cocina. There is no better place in this city to take a nacho newbie for his first bite of Tex-Mex and no better restaurant to hit time and again for the flavors you crave. Each outpost of the Mi Cocina empire has it all: fine handmade enchiladas, generous portions of chunky guacamole, to-die-for nachos topped with top-of-the-line ingredients, and stiff margaritas—all served in high-style, high-energy settings. Go ahead, start your e-mails and letters now. We will defend our choice right down to our last Mambo Taxi.



DEAN HUNTER MAPPLE

See our directory on page 89 for restaurant information.



Babe's

On Our Top 10 List Because:
When we want fried, we don't want to feel guilty.

With shiny high-rises and urban villages galore, it's easy to forget that Dallas is a city in the South. But we've got the home-cooking restaurants to prove it. Norma's, Mama's Daughters' Diner, Dixie House, Celebration—these are our versions of a deli or a diner, serving honest food at an affordable price. Babe's sets the standard: impeccable fried chicken, tender pot roast, chicken-fried steak, fragrant biscuits, mashed potatoes, and Grandma's creamed corn, all served family style. It's comfort food to keep it real for the condo dwellers.



RICHARD CHAMBERLAIN

Chamberlain's Steak and Chop House

On Our Top 10 Because:
Sometimes we want refinement with our rib-eye.

We could have picked 10 steak restaurants for this list, but instead of choosing a Bob's or an AI's, we're going with a Richard—as in Richard Chamberlain. Not that we don't love the high-testosterone, guy-friendly restaurants that populate this beef-obsessed town. It's just that sometimes we crave a little—okay, a lot—of finesse with our filet. And finesse is what sets Chamberlain's Steak and Chop House apart from the rest of the pack. Chamberlain, an award-winning chef, cut his chops in some of the finest restaurants in America before hanging out his own shingle in 1993. So when you order a filet, you can expect a maple-balsamic glaze instead of herbed butter. Sure chef Chamberlain offers the usual bigger-than-a-shoe baker, but he will urge you to stretch your palate with a side of broccoli baked in Vermont cheddar or a bowl of fresh-off-the-cob creamed corn. Other gourmet touches include an Asian-style dipping sauce for the lobster and stellar seared ahi tuna scented with soy and ginger.

Shinsei

On Our Top 10 Because:
Dallas does sushi, and Shinsei does it best.

Dallas does not lack for sushi joints, but famous Dallas chef wives Tracy "Mrs. Kent" Rathbun and Lynae "Mrs. Dean" Fearing take the concept to unprecedented heights. Top Chef finalist Casey Thompson may be gone, but Shinsei still has sushi master Shuji "Elvis" Sugawara, known for precise rolls and creative combos such as tuna with Japanese mustard and sriracha sauce. Of course, it doesn't hurt that Kent and Dean squeeze in consults when not in the kitchens at their own spots, *Abacus* and *Fearing's*.



SALMON AND TURP SALAD

Fireside Pies

On Our Top 10 Because: *We love a two-fisted slice of pizza.*

Fireside specializes in pizza, but it's more than just "great pies." It not only ignited a pizza revolution in Dallas, it embodies the artisan movement wherein ingredients are stringently selected and painstakingly prepared. That means basil torn by hand, ragged hunks of sausage, and tomatoes sliced extra thick. You can smell and taste the human touch. That said, this is some fierce pizza, with robust toppings and the most flavorful, pliable-yet-crispy crust around.



SALAD PIZZA



Best New Restaurants

THE YEAR'S TOP FRESHMEN

PANCETTA PIZZA

Nonna

Chef Julian Barsotti has Dallas palates wrapped around his finger like spaghetti around a meatball. His tiny Italian-American restaurant is always full of happy diners who love to chow down on Barsotti's innovative, seasonal takes on classic dishes. Everything from pasta to pizza dough to pancetta, ciccio, and mortadella is made in his kitchen. The menu may be small, but choosing one antipasti, one pasta dish, or one entree is a challenge—you will want to eat them all. Nothing says loving like something from chef Barsotti's wood-burning oven. His irreverent style of making pizza is bound to make him famous. If you haven't tried his white clam pie, you haven't lived.

Tei An

Teiichi "Teach" Sakurai raised the bar on sushi and robata-style grilling at Tei-Tei, and now he's furthering our education by showing us what a Japanese soba-noodle house is and should be. He makes the noodles by hand from nutty-tasting, nutritious buckwheat flour in a demonstration room, then serves them in ways both familiar and exotic in a dining room whose soothing minimalist interior creates a relaxing oasis. The menu is full of wonderful surprises, including unique rice dishes, flawless tempura, and musubi—or "musu-B"—rice balls wrapped in seaweed with a hidden treasure inside.



TEI-AN

• See our directory on page 69 for restaurant information.

Dali Wine Bar & Restaurant

Lots of restaurants try to be as offhandedly casual as Dali, but such success does not come without some calculated underpinnings. It's the difference between programming your lawn sprinklers versus hoping for rain. Owner Paul Pinnell has tweaked the knobs and adjusted the dials to create a supremely comfortable hangout with a flexible menu, a stunning patio, and a wine list that reflects years of collecting. Really, it's the ideal wine bar. Did we mention that this sassy spot overlooks the grounds of the new Arts District? A Champagne toast to that.



PAUL PINNELL

Rise No. 1

Hedda Dowd didn't just open a place to eat. She opened a restaurant dedicated to one of the most difficult dishes possible to execute: the soufflé. Here, the great French pursuit blossoms all pretty and puffed up like Texas clouds. The menu offers 13 types of soufflés, both sweet and savory, along with French-inspired salads, sandwiches, wines, and Champagnes. Once inside, you are surrounded by an atmosphere as authentic as it seems effortless, with vintage linens, a motley mix of one-of-a-kind European antique flatware, and wine glasses made from old wine bottles. C'est magnifique.



CHOCOLATE SOUFFLÉ



ICE CREAM SANDWICH

Ones to Watch

COWBOY CHOW

Head honcho Jason Boso offers a menu with a heart of gold—slow-cooked meats braised in a variety of liquids such as Lone Star beer, beef stock, jalapeño juice, tequila, chicken stock, red wine, bourbon, and Dr Pepper. Soft tacos, a greasy-in-the-good-way grilled cheese, and Boso's signature Mash tater parfait—layers of brisket, mashed potatoes, melted cheddar cheese, and "cowboy caviar"—are examples of the finest upscale cowboy cooking to hit this dusty trail in a long time.

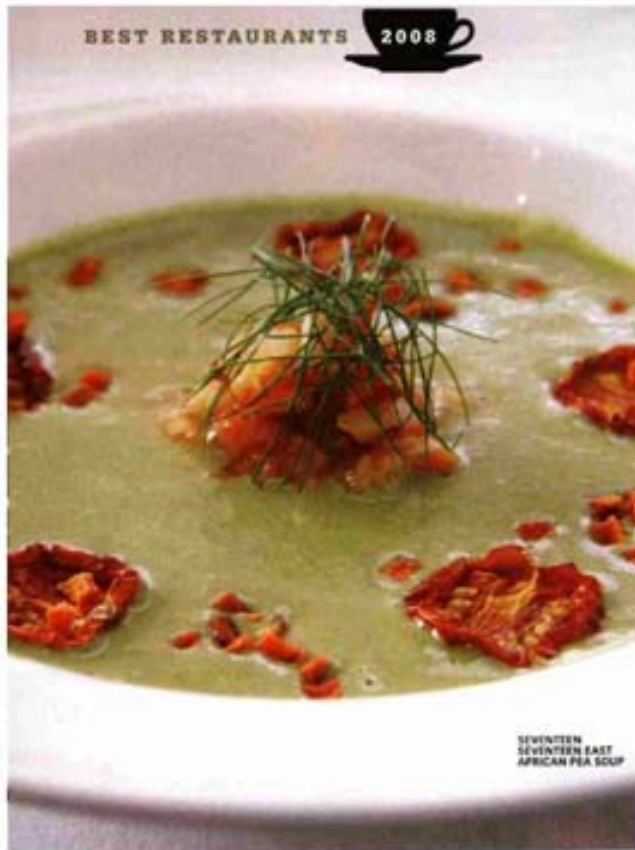
VICTOR TANGO'S

Just when you think Henderson Avenue has it all, Tristan Simon, owner of Consilient Restaurants (Hibiscus, Cuba Libre, The Porch, Fireside Pines), invents yet another concept you just have to have. This time it's a "gastro tavern," which is just a fancy term for a swanky bar with eclectic upscale bar bites designed by talented chef David McMillan. Expect offbeat tastes such as ahi tuna nachos alongside a plate of barbecued sticky pork ribs. Here a burger isn't just a burger—it's a rock star waiting to be discovered.

NEIGHBORHOOD SERVICES

Chef Nick Badovinus steps out of the shadows of Consilient Restaurants and struts his culinary stuff on his own at this 90-seat, neighborhood-friendly spot on the edge of the Park Cities. The bar serves cutting-edge cocktails while the kitchen rocks out Northern California-inspired dishes with roasted meats. The mid-century modern vibe is as hip and cool as the crowd.

BEST RESTAURANTS 2008



SEVENTEEN SEVENTEEN EAST AFRICAN PEA SOUP

See our directory on page 69 for restaurant information.

BEST SPLIT PEA SOUP
Seventeen
Seventeen

Quintessential Dallas chef Stephan Pyles engineered the menu update, and new executive chef Jason Ferraro has renewed the creative culinary force at Seventeen Seventeen. Witness the East African sweet pea soup: a server pours creamy, spicy-hot green bisque over shreds of lobster and oven-dried tomatoes. It warms the soul like the artwork on the walls below.

BEST WAY TO EAT YOUR BRUSSELS SPROUTS
The Second Floor

Chef J. Chastain breaks down the sprouts into individual leaves, then sautés them with

chopped ham and pine nuts until they're just barely soft and any bitterness is long gone.

BEST ICE CREAM SUNDAY
Eno's Tavern

Though this Oak Cliff pizza parlor's pies are minimalist works of art, the Eno's Sunday Sack is a decadent orgy that would make Caligula blush. Take one chocolate bag and stuff it with cookies-and-cream ice cream, bits of biscotti, chocolate sauce, local fruit compote, marshmallow cream, chopped nuts, cinnamon sugar, fresh whipped cream, and top it all with more fresh local fruit. Afterward, light up a cigarette and bask in the afterglow.

Simply the Best
 THE PLACES, PEOPLE, AND MEALS
 THAT MADE 2008 SO MEMORABLE

BEST CHEESE WITH YOUR WINE
Ari's Wine Bistro

We all cried when Il Sole closed, in large part because we thought we had to say goodbye to the abundant cheese plate we used to enjoy on the patio. Thankfully, the folks at Ari's Wine Bistro have an even better version. Cheese varieties from all over the globe include Brie, manchego, Roquefort, Maytag blue, and Dallas mozzarella and mascarpone, and they're served with olives, capers, fruit compote, and plenty of crostini. This is no wimpy

gourmet plate, either. Ari's gives you plenty of the good stuff for sharing with friends, glass of wine in hand.

BEST LOCAL RESTAURANT TO FIND FOODIES
Lola

When foodies ask each other for advice on where to eat, Lola tops the list. Two dining rooms, including a chef's tasting room, provide a platform for the kitchen to act on its wildest creative urges—aided by owner Van Roberts' superb and surprisingly affordable wine list.

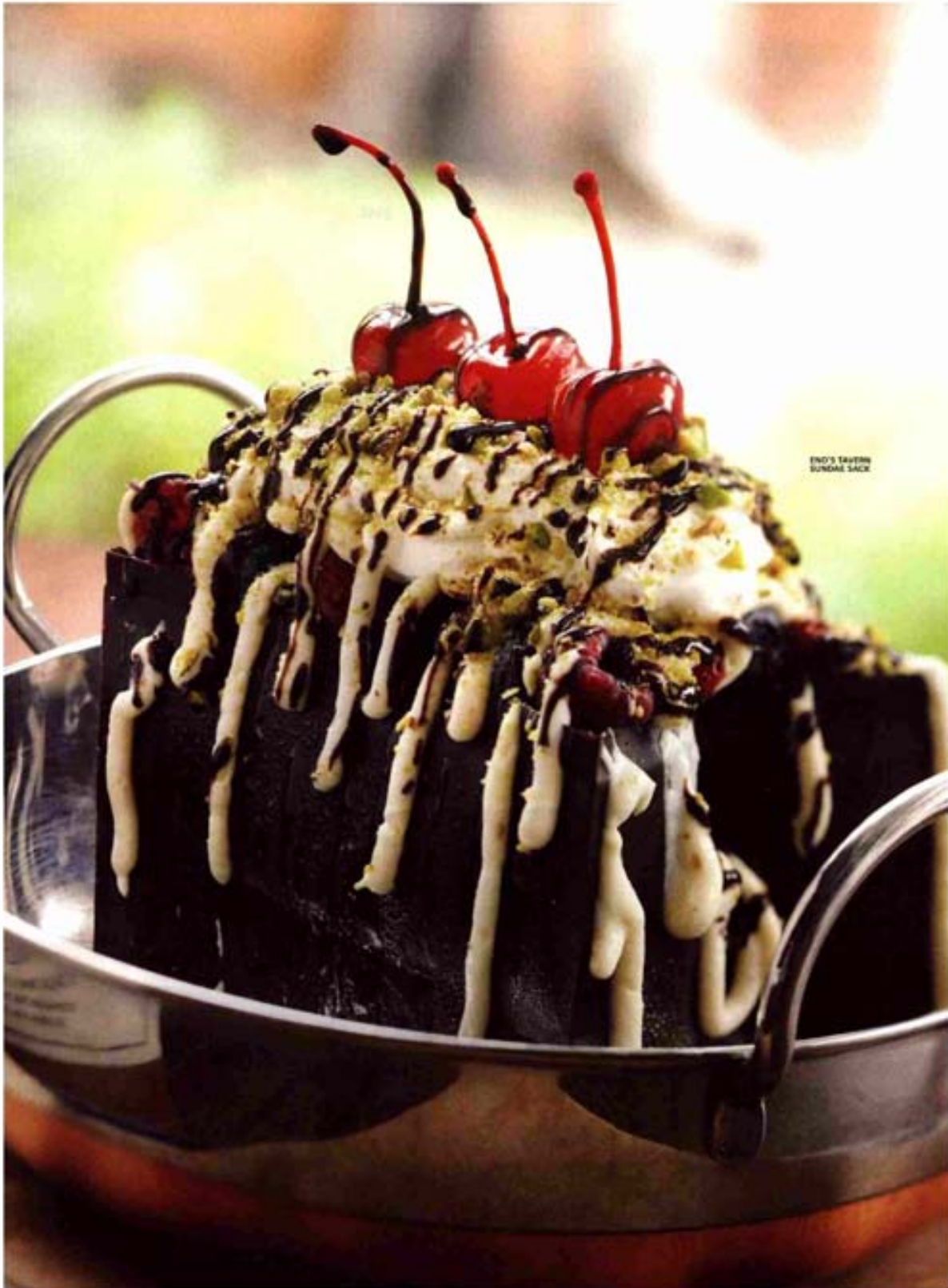


LOLA CHEF DAVID UYDOR

LOLA AND SUNDAY SACK: SCHMIDT; SOUP: KEVIN HUNTER/MARPLE



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END'S SAVORIN
SUNDAE SACK

BEST RESTAURANTS **2008**

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Critics' Picks Eggs Benedict

Where there is brunch, there is eggs Benedict. Every Saturday and Sunday should begin with this decadent combination of English muffin, sharp Canadian bacon, soft poached eggs, and rich hollandaise sauce. A few of our favorite eggs Benedicts around town:

**NANCY NICHOLE:
JASPER'S**

There isn't a weekend morning that I don't wake up feeling crabby. When I have the energy to get dressed, I head to Jasper's to fill my stomach and change my mood with a saasy plate of Kent Rathbun's version of eggs Benedict: two 3-inch potato-look hash brown rounds topped with Southwestern-spicy, jumbo lump crab cakes covered in rich hollandaise and garnished with slivers of ham.

**SARAH EYKANE:
TRECE**

Brunch is one of my favorite weekend pastimes, and after being pretty healthy all week, I'm ready to indulge a bit (not to mention soak up some of last night's vodka). Chef Ruben Peck's eggs Benedict at Trece does the trick. Think traditional Bennie but with jalapeño bacon, cilantro hollandaise, and the best part: eggs poached in tortilla

soup. Hearty and spicy. Don't skip the bottomless mimosa, either.

**TODD JOHNSON:
CAPITOL PUB**

It could be the hip Henderson Avenue address or the cozy bar-and-grill vibe. No matter. There's something special about Capitol Pub and its classic, no-frills, heavy-on-the-hollandaise eggs Benedict. Pierce the yolk of the perfectly poached eggs and sop up every last golden drop. Wash it down with Capitol's spicy Bloody Mary. It's Sunday morning at its brunch best.

**TERESA GUBBINS:
BENEDICT'S**

With a name like Benedict's, you know this place has the Benedicts covered. If the classic Benedict is not enough, consider a superb spinoff with smoked salmon or another topped with chunky asparagus spears.

**BEST WORKOUT FUEL
Mile High at Buzzbrews**

The unlikely combination of ingredients in this power breakfast might give some pause, but, trust us, it works. The base is a chewy piece of cinnamon-drenched whole wheat French toast, which is then topped with two veggie sausage patties, scrambled egg whites, and chopped nuts. Served with real maple syrup, the contrasting flavors and textures make for a tasty dose of lean protein, carbs, and healthy fat. Perfect for a pre- or post-gym meal.

**BEST NEWFANGLED FRIED TOMATOES
Lambert's**

As if a crunchy coating around a thick, tender slice of mouth-puckery green tomato isn't enough, Lambert's tops it with a generous scoop of crab-meat tossed in a luxurious remoulade. Tom-a-to, tom-ah-to—who cares? It's delicious.

**BEST GREEK TREAT
Baklava parfait at Papou's**

The baklava at this funky Lakewood outpost can easily stand on its own—a crispy, honeyed pastry with pleasing density and nice balance of nutty and sweet. Layer it with vanilla ice cream, however, and the humble triangle reaches new heights. It's a simple concept—technically just two ingredients—but the marriage of creamy and chewy sweetness elevates the sum beyond its parts.

**BEST CHILES RELLENO
Esteban's Restaurante**

Owner Esteban Rios delivers authentic Mexican fare (he's from Michoacán) smack in the middle of fajita-infested suburbia, aka Garland's Firewheel Town Center. Though Rios' Aztec specialties delight, it's the brisket and roasted-almond-stuffed chiles relleno (a Wednesday night special) that warms our queso-covered hearts the most.



EGGS BENEDICT: KEVIN MAZUR/MANVILLE; CHILES RELLENO: CUSTODY SCHNEIDER; TOROES: THE NEW WALLACES



One to Watch GRAHAM DODDS, BOLSA

[The Bee Charmer]

Business at the recently opened Bolsa in the Bishop Arts District has been booming. That's good news for executive chef Graham Dodds, who started the cafe with a simple vision: to use local and organic ingredients in creating dishes with classical preparations. The downside: Dodds isn't able to spend as much time with his bees as he'd like. "It's very Zen, almost like therapy," Dodds says of his apiarian avocation. "The bees are an amazing community all working together." They're like business partners, too, as Dodds showcases on his menu the honey from his hives. And they better stay busy. Bolsa is already such a hit that there's been talk of expansion. But Dodds says he's focused on the one restaurant right now and hopes to preserve its individuality.



One to Watch

LEE FUQUA, FUQUA WINERY

[The Late Bloomer]

Lee Fuqua used to be a scotch lover. But after he took a wine appreciation course on a whim, his passion went from malts to grapes. And, before long, his study of viniculture went from hobby to business, thanks to a not-so-subtle suggestion from his wife Julia that he take his experiments outside of the house. "She caught me rolling a French oak barrel around our living room one day and that was it," he says. At the still-ripening age of 54, Fuqua finally opened his winery, tucked away near Love Field, blending the highest quality Texas grapes picked from the Newsome Vineyards in the Texas High Plains. He bottles his multi-award-winning wines himself (his 2004 Texas red wine won the silver at the 2006 Finger Lakes International Wine Competition) and attributes his success to 17 years of learning what not to do. "I have good taste," Fuqua says. "If I make something bad, I throw it away. I won't put my name on it."

BEST VEGAN BAKERY

Covert Vegan Baking Company

Okay, the Covert Vegan Baking Company was the first vegan bakery in town, and it's so clandestine that you have to know the secret handshake to order from their animal product-free line of cookies, cupcake, muffins, and cinnamon rolls. Okay, so you don't have to know a secret handshake, but you do need to know owner Rachael McBride's phone number because her stuff has limited availability (only Crooked Tree Coffeehouse and Green Spot). A vegan herself, she created her goodies out of necessity when she couldn't find baked goods made without

milk or eggs. She sells seven kinds of cookies (\$10): snickerdoodle, peanut butter, mint chocolate chocolate chip, ginger molasses, chocolate chip, oatmeal raisin, and oatmeal chocolate-chip. Don't worry. They'll satisfy your sweet tooth. She does use sugar.

BEST THOUSAND ISLAND DRESSING

Morton's The Steakhouse

Why is it that we are having such a hard time getting over our obsession with chunky blue cheese? It's not just for salads anymore. We eat it sprinkled over potato chips, melted on top of hamburgers, and even frozen as ice cream. Thanks to Morton's The Steakhouse, the

good ol' days have returned, when men were men and a salad dressing was a glorious concoction of mayonnaise, ketchup, and mustard mixed with bits of olives, pickles, horseradish, and celery, and it was called Thousand Island.

BEST REASON TO PULL PORK

Peggy Sue BBQ

How about a big, steaming bowl of Hoppin' John? It is black-eyed peas, medium-grain rice, diced onion, garlic, and gringo peppers tossed together and topped with a big ol' blob of smoky pulled pork. Thanks to the folks at Peggy Sue BBQ, living in the South has never tasted so good.

• See our directory on page 60 for restaurant information.

BEST CARBO LOAD
The Breadbasket at Abacus

We love [Abacus restaurant](#) for all kinds of reasons, but the breadbasket is simply one of the best we've seen anywhere. Pastry chef Rick Griggs and his team bake the bread fresh every day, and the overflowing basket's goodies range from sourdough baguettes to multigrain with millet, flax, and wheat germ to lemon-poppy seed lavash to herb and cheddar cream biscuits to focaccia with toppings like smoked tomato and onion with Gruyère and Parmesan cheese.

BEST FOWL BALLS
Turkey Meatballs at Villa-O

Before we had a chance to try Villa-O, two different friends squawked about the hidden gem on the menu: turkey meatballs. "They're so big! They're so good! Only \$6!" they said. Three huge organic meatballs covered in marinara sauce are just right for those looking for a low-carb meal or those who wish to spend their money on frozen Sfuzzis instead. Hint: look for them under "sides."

BEST WAY TO GET YOUR SOY
Sakura roll at Zen Sushi

The premium combo of clam, shrimp, and crab comes rolled in a wrapper made of delectably chewy pastel pink soy "paper" rather than the same-old seaweed. It's almost too pretty to eat.



PHOTO: TREVOR PAULIANS; EGG: GUSTAV SCHMIDT; BURGER: KEVIN HUNTER/SHARPE

TIM LUDKE
 SAKURA ROLL



LOVE SHACK
 DIRTY LOVE BURGER

Critics' Picks
Chef-Driven Burger

We all have our idea of the perfect burger. So do trained chefs. The humble burger is a simple formula that gets everyone obsessing about the tiniest details: soft bun or toasted? Sirloin or chuck? Grilled onion or raw? Too many choices, except in the hands of professionals.

NANCY NICHOLS:
LOVE SHACK

My life would be nothing if I couldn't indulge from time to time in a little Dirty Love. That would be the Dirty Love burger at Love Shack. Chef Tim Love's not-too-small, not-too-big patties made from ground tenderloin and brisket are topped with thick slices of bacon and melted American cheese on a Mrs. Baird's bun. When I'm dieting, I "86" the quail egg and order a raspberry shake.

into haute cuisine with his critically lauded Reata in Fort Worth and then seemed to disappear. Now he's making the best burgers west of the Trinity River at Dutch's, and it's worth the drive for the No. 4: a classic burger topped with hickory barbecue sauce, bacon, cheese, and Thousand Island dressing. Yes, you read right. The marriage of the two zippy sauces makes this burger highly addictive.

TERESA GOBBINI:
WHO'S WHO

Phil Romano beat the pack in 2002 when he started serving luxurious burgers made from treasured Kobe beef at Who's Who Burgers. Get it medium rare, with grilled onions and mushrooms, lettuce, and tomato, on one of their signature sourdough buns. Chase it with a vanilla milkshake, flecked with real vanilla beans.

SARAH EVKANS:
TWISTED ROOT BURGER CO.

At Twisted Root, chefs Jason Boso and Quincy Hart take pride in their homemade philosophy. They hand-roll their half-pound Angus burgers every day; make ketchup, pickles, and pretty much everything else in-house; and have pastry chef Stephen Thompson whip up ice cream for milkshakes. I love a good burger, but I also like to pile it high with extras, and at Twisted Root I can choose yummys like guacamole, Deep Ellum goat cheese, bacon, or—best yet—an onion ring.

TODD JOHNSON:
DUTCH'S

Do you remember chef Grady Spears? He transformed chuck wagon grub



TRULUCK'S CHOCOLATE SEDUCTION CAKE

Critics' Picks Chocolate Cake

It's the dessert of all desserts, more universal even than apple pie. It does a lot more than satisfy your sweet tooth. A great chocolate cake can get you through a personal crisis, substitute for a hot date, and maybe even bring enlightenment. Hey, we can dream.

NANCY NICHOLS: TRULUCK'S

I've said it before, and I'm afraid I will have to say it again: Truluck's makes the best chocolate cake in Dallas. Okay, the best tall chocolate cake. When I want something small, I'm still in love with the devil's food sheet cake at Highland Park Cafeteria.

TERESA GIBBONS: BULI CAFE

Buli Cafe, the tiny Cedar Springs coffeehouse, gets its cakes from veteran Dallas baker Massimo, including the chocolate fudge cake. The profoundly dense confection has three layers of firm chocolate cake interspersed with thick-o-fudgy butter-cream chocolate icing and a delicate ribbon of raspberry preserves.

SARAH EVZANS: STEIN'S BAKERY

Stein's Bakery is definitely not in my neighborhood, but the drive

is well worth the cheaper prices and fantastic cupcakes, cookies, and petit fours (a must for baby showers). And the chocolate cake is to die for. It's nothing fancy—just four layers of soft cake between thick layers of super-sweet icing, with a few chocolate sprinkles on the side. A simple slice is a good reminder that dessert doesn't have to be avant-garde or expensive to be darn tasty.

TODD JOHNSON: BREAD WINNERS

Sometimes I can't decide between the three loves of my life: dark, milk, and white chocolate. Happily, I don't have to choose. The aptly named Chocolate Seduction cake at Bread Winners satisfies my cocoa cravings with its alternating cake layers of white chocolate, devil's food, and German chocolate, all anchored by a dense brownie. Love has never tasted this good.

BEST RESTAURANTS 2008

BEST SWEET TEA Screen Door

In a land of fruit-flavored, overly complicated brews (coconut chai tea anyone?), Screen Door gets it right with its classic Southern iced tea: slightly sweet and totally refreshing. Best of all, they serve a beaker of flavored simple sugar syrup that mixes instantly and harmoniously into the tea, unlike hard sugar that seemingly takes forever to dissolve and usually ends up at the bottom of the glass. Life is short, and every sip should be perfect.



BEST REASON TO GIVE A FIG TruFire prosciutto pizza

Fig on a pizza? Yes, please—especially when paired with paper-thin sheets of prosciutto. You get a juxtaposition of sweet and tangy that's as surprising as it is sophisticated.

BEST FAST FOOD Kit Kitchen at Central Market

Imagine sitting down to a beautiful homemade bowl of spicy Thai pho. Now imagine that you made it yourself. Now know that you can do it fast and easy thanks to the new Express Chef section at Central Market in Dallas. Each day about 30 to 40 recipes—Italian, Mediterranean, or Asian-inspired—are posted next to a case with all of the ingredients pre-measured. All you have to do is pick your protein, sauce, vegetables, and starch and heat it up. God forbid you should have to burn any calories by searching all over the store for ingredients—they're all in one place.

BEST NEW-WAVE CALIFORNIA ROLL Beverly Hills Roll at Dallas Fish Market

New sushi chef Shige Tateno ditches the usual mayo-laden crab salad you find in a regular, ho-hum California roll and replaces it with tender strands of Alaskan king crab. Each piece makes us appreciate those hard-working fishermen on *Deadliest Catch* even more.

CAKE: KEVIN HUNTER/SHARPE; PIZZA: GUSTAV SCHWABE; DINNER: BOB/JOHANNA MARRIN



Critics' Picks Restaurants So Good We Wish They Were Born Here

NANCY NICHOLS: **THE OCEANAIRE** (MINNEAPOLIS)

This restaurant makes me feel special—like Claudette Colbert walking onto the set of a 1930s movie that takes place on a sexy ocean liner. Everyone looks good in the lighting, and the sleek lines are as pleasing to the eye as the seafood is to the palate. The fish is always fresh, the crab cake is one of the best, and that plate of thick potato hash browns is the bomb.

TERESA GIBBINS: **R&D KITCHEN** (NEWPORT BEACH)

If only Dallas were the kind of city to spawn a place this practical and unpretentious—yet quality-conscious, with pristine ingredients and sharp flavors. The small but savvy menu has meat loaf, entrée salads, and omelets for dinner—why not? Don't overlook the smart wine list, too, with unique wines by the glass.

TODD JOHNSON: **CRAFT DALLAS** (NEW YORK)

Long before he found fame as a judge on Top Chef,

restaurantier Tom Colicchio created the James Beard award-winning Craft. Luckily, nothing was lost in translation when Craft Dallas opened at the W Hotel in 2006. The same attention to fine, fresh ingredients prepared simply and served family style—a hallmark of all Craft locations—is alive and well. The menu may read basic—beef short rib and root vegetables, quail and golden raisins, an assortment of roasted mushrooms—but simplicity never tasted this good.

SARAH EVEANS: **CHARLIE PALMER** (NEW YORK)

I'm not supposed to say this, but I love Charlie Palmer because it makes me feel like I'm not in Dallas. This restaurant is sleek and sophisticated and looks like someone grabbed it right out of Manhattan. Try chef Palmer's surf and swine, with smooth scallops and luscious pork belly, while Adam Tihany-designed turbines spin lazily overhead and cars zip past on Main Street. It's a New York state of mind.

BEST RESTAURANTS 2008

BEST SOMMELIER IN DALLAS

Scott Barber, Rosewood's Mansion on Turtle Creek

In less than two years, Barber, a former art dealer, has taken his "wine hobby" and turned it into an enviable career, winning 2008's Best Sommelier in Texas. Barber, 40, worked at Stephan Pyles and spent three months at The French Laundry in Napa before landing the coveted spot at the Mansion. He operates on a single premise: the right bottle of wine for the right meal. "If it makes the food taste better, it's the right pairing," he says. "I'm not going to sell an expensive bottle of wine if it doesn't make the food taste better. Then it becomes a bad bottle of wine."

BEST "CHEAP" LUNCH

Aurora

"Cheap" being a relative term. But to get a three-course meal of baby greens, sole with shrimp, and a trio of house-made sorbets by world-class chef Avner Samuel for \$16.95 is surely a bargain. "Cheap" is such a tacky word, come to think of it.

BEST SALAMI HUNG THE RIGHT WAY

Ed's Deli

There's no place in town that does hard salami quite like Ed's Deli. Owner and native New Yorker Ed Brandt dries Hebrew National all-beef, kosher salami by hanging it in his storefront for six weeks, creating an intensely spicy and addictive flavor. In fact, his hard salami is so popular that Brandt can't keep it on the shelves with customers calling daily to place orders. Be sure to grab a loaf of rye and some deli-style pickles on your way to the register.

BEST CURRIED CHICKEN SALAD

Bleu Artichoke Cafe

Even though we can never remember if the Bleu Artichoke Cafe is located inside of Lost Antiques or Found Antiques, it's worth shopping for. This popular lunch-only spot serves a killer salad made with chunks of chicken tossed in low-fat yogurt and blended with mango and walnut chutney for the ultimate taste sensation. Find it at Found.



CRAFT: VICTOR SMOGOTZ; KEVIN HUNTER; MARIKO; CHICKEN SALAD: GUY/ISTOCKPHOTO; BOLA; GIBBINS/LAUREN